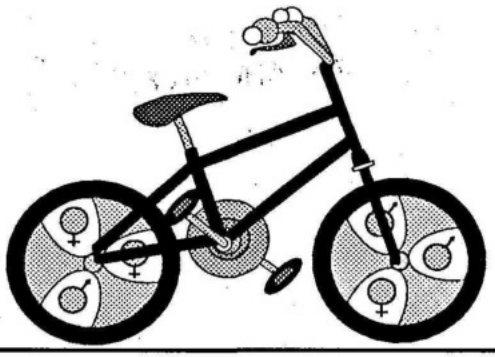


OBN NEWS

February 1991

OBN News, 519 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2C9 Tel: (416)-649-1356 / Fax: (416)-649-1314

The Ontario Bisexual Network (OBN) is a group formed to enable contacts among bisexual people in Ontario, and to help them undertake activities of interest. At present, these activities include: a mailing list, a newsletter, support group meetings, social activities, a political action group, education of others, information sharing, and safe sexuality information. The network's only mandate is to bring people together. — OBN Meeting, August 2, 1990.

CTV Shirley Show Will Feature Bisexuality

The Valentine's day show for CTV's Shirley Show is called "Bisexuality — Coping With the Truth and Dealing With the Prejudice". Everyone is welcome to join the audience for the show, which is held at 38 Yorkville Avenue at 7 p.m. on Thursday, February 14th. Call Todd in advance at 928-6300 for free tickets, before they run out.

Anyone willing to be interviewed on the show should call Helayna at the same number, as soon as possible.

Bisexuality Exposed in *The Varsity*

University of Toronto's student newspaper *The Varsity* published an eight-page Gay and Lesbian Supplement in their January 31st issue, to celebrate Lesbian and Gay Awareness Week on the campus. The supplement featured the following special article:

BISEXUALITY - The Hidden Option

by Bruce Small

What allows you to claim the label *bisexuality* is an ability to be physically attracted to either men or women. This attraction may not be equal for both genders, and may vary over time. As with all labels, someone with attractions to both genders may or may not choose to identify as *bisexual.* Many choose to identify as gay, lesbian or heterosexual, or to remain unlabelled.

Bisexuality is much more common than most people in our society believe. For many reasons, bisexual people have been generally less visible than gay and lesbian people (though possible more numerous), and at least in Canada to date have been slower to organize and fight against homophobia and gay oppression.

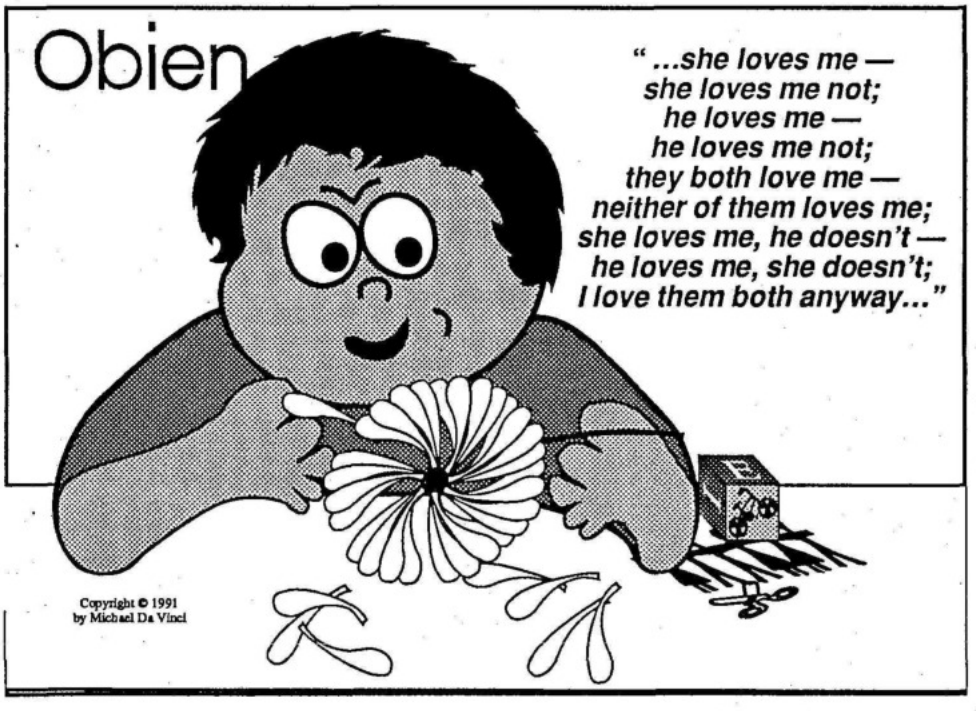
Little research has been done to determine for sure how common bisexuality really is in our society. Based on research done by Kinsey in the 1940s and 1950s, as many as 15-25% of women and 33-46% of men might be considered to be bisexual, based on their activities or attractions.

Many people who now consider themselves to be bisexual were raised in virtual ignorance of the possibility of being physically attracted to both genders. As with many others who later adopted the labels 'gay' and 'lesbian', oppression of same-gender attraction was severe enough to temporarily rule out that option too.

Sharing a Common Cause

As with most gay and lesbian people, bisexual people start out *in the closet*, and most have been raised in environments which were not friendly towards same-gender attraction. Bisexuals therefore share many of the same internalized negative feelings that are sometimes found among lesbians and gay men, particularly before they discover their respective communities and begin to 'come out' to friends, families and co-workers.

Lesbians, gay men and bisexual men and women have begun to work together toward the common cause of ending oppression and prejudice which is based on the excuse that someone is attracted to the same gender. We are all working



CANADIAN GAY ARCHIVES

toward creating a world in which sexual orientation is not used as a basis for discriminatory practices or for violence or hatred.

Internalized Oppression

It is common among oppressed groups to sometimes act or feel as if you have actually begun to believe the untruths that are being said about you. Some people tend to fulfil the 'stereotypes' that are used by others instead of real information about people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual. (Most of the behaviours that people associate with being gay, lesbian or bisexual have *no* inherent connection with loving people of the same gender.)

The other peculiar effect of internalized oppression is to lead people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual to criticize or malign others who are within these same groups. Thus some bisexual women complain of having being rejected by lesbian groups, some bisexual men complain of feeling unwelcome in gay groups. Bisexuals are sometimes accused of 'straddling the fence' or 'hanging onto heterosexuality' because of the security of being in the closet.

Fortunately, despite these sometimes strange effects of having been undervalued by others, lesbian, gay and bisexual people have their humanity intact and many have worked through the bad feelings to the point of becoming totally comfortable with themselves and with others who are attracted either to the same gender or both genders. Working together and loving and supporting each other need not be a problem.

Diversity is our Reality

As with all other social groups, bisexuals represent a diverse collection of loveable, laughable human beings, and their lives and interests vary widely, as do their relationships with others.

Some live alone and have no particular 'significant other'. Some are in a monogamous relationship with someone of the same gender, or with someone of the opposite gender. Some are married. Some have more than one significant relationship, for example, a married bisexual may also have a boyfriend or girlfriend in addition to a wife or husband. Some live together with more than one person in more complex relationships, such as triads. Being non-monogamous has been one excuse used by others to criticize some bisexual people, in addition to their same-gender attraction. In many ways, Canadian society is closer to accepting same-gender attractions than to accepting non-monogamous relationships.

Closeting and its Hazards

Many bisexual men and women are closeted, and some 'double-closeted'.

They may not be 'out' to their families and straight friends, but neither are they 'out' to their gay and lesbian friends, who may know them as gay or lesbian rather than bisexual.

Many bisexual men who are married are not 'out' to their wives. Some unmarried bisexual people also do not disclose their orientation to one or more of their lovers. Although this may be understandable given the fear that is often associated with coming out of the closet, it leaves the other partner in the dark about his or her potential risk if they are involved in unprotected sexual activity.

It is important particularly for married women to understand that some men may be gay or bisexual, but unwilling to disclose this. Within the marriage, the monogamous partner may think it is safe to assume that the other is also monogamous, and that unprotected sex might be safe (given proof that there was no infection of either partner prior to the marriage).

The problem of closeting can therefore lead to significant health problems under these circumstances (e.g. transmission of HIV and other STDs). Add to this the psychological shock of finding out simultaneously that a) your partner is not monogamous b) you have just acquired an uncomfortable and possibly deadly disease and c) your partner has same-gender attractions.

Clear communication between partners in a relationship becomes ever more important, as does the need to change the circumstances in our society that lead gay, lesbian and bisexual people to stay 'in the closet' for protection.

As with gay men and lesbians, there can be tremendous relief to bisexual people to discover the many thousands of others out there who have similar attractions, both to regain the rightful feeling of normality, and to find others to share time and affections with.

Fortunately, bisexuals the world over are starting to organize, and groups are forming in many places. There were major conferences on bisexuality held in May, 1989 in Boston, Massachusetts, and in June, 1990 in San Francisco, California. Toronto has been suggested for a possible international gathering in 1992.

CLASSIFIED ADS

HOUSEMATE needed for March 1st, $333-$400. High ceiling, hardwood floors, unfinished basement, storage, back yard. King/Bathurst. Call Rob at 362-9892.

MOVING SALE AND SOCIAL Saturday, February 23rd, 3 p.m. to 3 a.m. Call Rob at 362-9892.

Meeting Times

Meetings are held on the first Thursday of every month, from 6 to 8 p.m., and on the third Thursday of every month from 8 to 10 p.m., at the 519 Community Center (519 Church Street, just north of Wellesley). To add your name to our mailing list write to OBN at the address above.

Who to Contact

The following is a list of OBN members who have volunteered their time to talk with you about questions you may have, or if you just need someone for emotional support:

Bill Jeffery (416) 922-4262
Bruce Small (416) 649-1356
Carol Broderick (416) 766-7011
Catherine Crockett(416)537-5832
Les Green (416) 968-6955
Rob Cusson (416)-362-9892
Scott Lucas (416) 633-5666

Matchmakers

To find other bi's for companionship or romance, speak to Elana at the next OBN meeting.